

the thought that counts by lymricks

Series: [you'll lose the blues in Chicago \[4\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: M/M

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-13

Updated: 2018-09-23

Packaged: 2022-04-23 02:41:28

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 3

Words: 4,385

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

“How much did it cost,” Billy says again, still a statement, not a question.

Steve blanches. “It’s a gift, Billy. I don’t think--”

“How. Much.”

Steve puts his gift-buying foot in his mouth.

&

To Billy from Termites. The kids give Billy a coat on Thanksgiving.

&

Billy gives Steve the dubious gift of doing the laundry. It ends up being pretty special.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

The rest of the longer stuff is coming, but for now have a little thing I wrote for a tumblr prompt last night (thanks anon!!), put up here to stay organized, in which Steve puts his gift-buying foot in his mouth. Set sometime after the end of "in the business of" and before "you may ask yourself."

this ended up being the place I put gift-themed (...like, LOOSELY themed) little bits and pieces from this verse.

"What the fuck is this," Billy says, no question mark at the end of his sentence.

Steve, sitting on the couch, shifts nervously. "Uhm," he says, not really sure what else to say. It says what it is on the fucking box. "Your--birthday present?"

They haven't been together long enough, apparently, for Steve to buy Billy good presents, judging by that reaction. Steve wonders how he could have gotten this wrong. He'd been so sure.

They have been together long enough, though, that Steve watches the microexpressions play out across Billy's face. Something tense like anger settles in at the corners of his mouth. He's not looking at Steve. "How much did it cost," Billy says again, still a statement, not a question.

Steve blanches. "It's a gift, Billy. I don't think--"

"How. Much."

Steve looks down at his hands, scratches at his jeans. He's embarrassed, but he isn't sure why. "\$150," he says, mostly a whisper.

Steve doesn't have to look up to see the way Billy flinches, can hear it

in his voice as he breathes out, “One hundred fi--fucking *Christ* what is wrong with you?”

“I wanted to get you something nice,” Steve protests, and even to his own ears it sounds a little bit like a whine. Like a spoiled kid who could sell the car his parents bought him to fund his move to Chicago, to pay his rent for months while he looked for work he liked, to coast. He can hear that in his voice, King Steve with his heated pool and his fancy technology, spending \$150 because he *wanted to get Billy something nice*. He hadn’t thought about what that would look like.

“I don’t want it,” Billy says. “I don’t want it. Return it.”

Steve looks up so fast he feels a little dizzy, but Billy isn’t looking at him. He’s looking at the box in his hands, and there isn’t just anger on his face anymore. Steve can’t place it, which is frustrating, because he feels like he always knows what Billy’s thinking, or at least he can approximate it. There are times when they’re lying in bed, and Steve knows Billy’s thinking of something he isn’t yet ready to share, and his face does a thing, and Steve slides closer, presses his lips against Billy’s shoulder and kisses and touches until Billy’s face smoothes out.

Billy wears an expression like that now, only the couch cushion between them is an ocean, and Steve doesn’t remember how to swim.

“I--” he says, then stops. “It’s a present.”

“Then I’ll fucking return it!” Billy snaps, still not looking at him. “Do you have any idea how much money that is? What it could be used to--what am I saying? Of course you don’t. Look who I’m talking to. *Princess*,” Billy sneers the last word, and it’s Steve’s turn to flinch. Princess had been mocking when they’d met again, then a little fond, now it’s--dismissive.

“I just thought--”

“You didn’t think,” Billy says. “You never *think* about--about money. Me having a job was about me not being able to disappear for you. Me having a job was about me sticking around. Me having a job for

me? Was about *eating* and *rent*. You never think about the cost of *anything*. You really are just spoiled, aren't you? Fuck."

Steve feels his cheeks heat, knows he's red from anger or embarrassment or both. "That's not true," he says, defensive, but then-- it isn't, but also it is. He's been on his own for three and a half years now, and he does fine for himself. He's been on his own--

Well, not on his own, because Hopper still swings by to help him patch things up. Not on his own, because sometimes his parents pay the extra money for him to fly home, because his parents have an extra car to lend him when they're in Hawkins, because when the kids visit they sleep on air mattresses that cost almost as much as Steve's actual mattress, which his parents just gave up.

Billy says he hates flying. He always insists they take the bus. Steve feels like a fucking idiot.

Billy's been *on his own* in a much more literal sense for a lot longer. Billy's looking at him, ready for a fight, his cheeks a little red too, his mouth tight. Billy's shoulders are tense, which is how Steve knows Billy's *ready* for a fight, but that he doesn't *want* one. "Baby," Steve says, horrified at himself all of the sudden, understanding--not just in a seeing it as it happens way, but really thinking about--for the first time why Billy likes to do the grocery shopping, why he's always looking through coupon books. He reaches for Billy, then stops, his hand hovering awkwardly in the air between them. He doesn't call Billy *baby* very often. He thinks it's that, more than the aborted touch, more than the way he turns his full body to face Billy, more than anything, that makes Billy still and listen. Steve needs him to listen because--"I'm sorry," Steve says, and he really fucking is.

Steve can remember the first time he was having Nancy over to his apartment in Chicago. How stressed he'd been, how perfect he had wanted it to be. She was, even all those years ago, even right after high school, something like his other half. She was the person--still is the person--he called when he needed someone to sort out his head. She liked red wine. He'd gone to the store to get a bottle to go with dinner, and he'd wanted something *nice*, not too nice, but nice, and he'd thought he was carefully checking prices. He can still remember how stupid and embarrassed he'd felt when the cashier told him it

was a \$50 bottle. He'd bought it anyway. Had the money to blow. Didn't want her to know he was that stupid. How lucky he was--how lucky he is, he catches himself, to be able to just--do that without worrying. Steve is proud of the life he's built for himself in Chicago, but he's always known that if it didn't work out he could go back home.

Billy is looking at him, and there's an expression on his face that Steve can't read, and that makes Steve feel a little scared. "I'm sorry," Steve says again, and he reaches out the rest of the way, presses the tips of his fingers to Billy's thigh. "Fuck, Billy," he says, "I didn't think."

The look on Billy's face is surprise, Steve realizes, all of the sudden. He's *surprised* that Steve is *apologizing*. Steve wants to go to Hawkins and burn Neil Hargrove's house to the ground. He wants to go to California and burn that to the ground too, burn anyone who has ever made Billy feel like he didn't deserve to be *heard* to the ground, because Steve's an asshole sometimes and right now Billy's right, he's *right* and Billy's surprised that Steve's admitting it.

It's a rare moment, Billy Hargrove stunned into silence. Steve takes advantage of it, takes the box out of Billy's hands and sets it on the table. The couch between them is an ocean, but Billy's eyes are something like a life vest, or whatever, and Steve crosses to him, straddles Billy's lap, kisses him. "I'll return it," he says, "It's your birthday. You get what you want." Steve presses his forehead against Billy's, traces his fingertips over Billy's collar bone, exposed--as always--by his shirt. "I'm an idiot," he says.

"Sometimes," Billy agrees, finally speaking. His hand comes up to tangle in the hair at the nape of Steve's neck. He tugs a little. "You could still buy me dinner."

Birthdays after that are easy. One small present. Dinner at a restaurant they love.

Easy.

2. The one with the coat

Summary for the Chapter:

To Billy from Termites

Notes for the Chapter:

I didn't want to post a whole new part to Chicago, but THEN I realized this is a great catch all place to put fic about gifts.

Anyway, it's a gift giving holiday for some people. Here's the time the kids got Billy a coat for Thanksgiving.

Harrington has been gone for one hour and twenty four minutes. Billy has given up on trying to act like he's Totally Fine hanging around the Harrington house with Harrington's ex-girlfriend and *six teenagers*. He's bored as shit and they're all fucking weird as shit and Hawkins makes his skin crawl.

He's here for Thanksgiving and the turkey better be fucking incredible.

Harrington had pressed a kiss to his temple one hour and twenty--five, now--minutes ago before running out to the store with Jonathan. A few quick things, he said. A few quick things Billy's ass. He should have just gone with them. Except--

"I ran into your dad at the grocery store that one time," Harrington had murmured. Billy had been sitting on the Harrington's kitchen island and Harrington was standing between the v of his thighs. The sentence made Billy flinch away and cut his gaze, but Steve's hands on his thighs had kept him from jumping off. "I'm just saying I don't think you should come with me for this," Steve had continued, and he'd run his hands up Billy's thighs and kissed at Billy's lower lip. Sometimes when Harrington did that Billy felt like he was drowning and it was maybe the best thing he'd felt probably ever. It made him want to say yes to whatever Harrington was asking of him. "I don't

want your dad to surprise you.” It’s a fair point, Billy has to concede that. He doesn’t want to see his dad, doesn’t want him to appear beside the eggo waffles, doesn’t want to hear the low undertone of his voice, or see his stupid fucking mustache. That’s why--when they’re in Hawkins--he almost never goes anywhere without Harrington as an escort. That’s why--right now--he is wandering aimlessly around Harrington’s house while Nancy pointedly does not stare and all six teenagers track his movements like some sort of birds of prey.

He’s going to have to come back and do this all over again for Christmas, although probably at the Byers’s house. They’re only here because Harrington’s parents are out of town for the holiday and the kids like all the different rooms in the house and Harrington’s bigger tv.

Back for Christmas. Billy doesn’t want to come back here ever. Twice in less than a month is--a lot for him to know is coming.

“I need a smoke,” he mumbles to the room at large, grabbing his brown leather jacket--the same one from high school, he loves it and they’re expensive to replace--and wanders out into the backyard. “Fuck,” he says to the empty air outside, tipping his head back to exhale smoke in a stream at the starless sky. He’d never come here in high school, but he’d been four houses over once. He can still hear the echoes of the sirens he’d run from after climbing out that girl’s window, laughing, with his pants half off.

Billy breathes in cold air and smoke. He should have gone to the store, but in the eight months they’ve been together, Billy’s been back to Hawkins, been staying at the Harrington’s house, been chauffeured around in the passenger seat of a borrowed car that Harrington’s driving a lot of times. He thinks people have probably put two and two together about Steve Harrington and Billy Hargrove. He doesn’t know why it bothers him so much, but he wonders--all the fucking time--what people in this shitty little town think about the Harrington boy being in some sort of *arrangement* with that no good Hargrove kid. He doesn’t mind being the no good kid so much as he minds the things it must make people think about Harrington--about--about Steve.

He pats his pocket, but there's no more cigarettes there and already Billy feels jittery with the knowledge, like he's drowning and not in the good way. He hopes someone else has a pack, but who's he going to ask? Dustin? He's still half-grinning to himself at the thought of asking *Dustin* for a cigarette when he slides the door open and steps back inside. It's too cold to stand outside, especially without a cigarette. Even while he'd been smoking, Billy was fighting the biting Indiana chill.

The kids are huddled together just inside the door. Dustin has both hands on his head. Lucas is looking back and forth between Mike and Dustin in disbelief.

"He's already got a jacket," Mike is saying, waving his hands around.

"It's not a winter coat," Will answers. He's standing more in the middle of the circle and he cuts his gaze to El, who nods. "It's not very warm," he adds.

"We also *already bought it!*" Lucas rolls his eyes then turns the full force of his glare on Mike. Billy's impressed by how intense it is. Kid's been practicing in the mirror, maybe. "So this whole conversation is stupid."

"We have to do it for Steve," Dustin explains.

"For *him*, too. He's cold," the weird girl--Hopper's daughter, El, adds.

"I already said we should do this," Max says, and she huffs on a big sigh. "He doesn't--it's right to."

"And *we already bought it*," Lucas says again.

"I just think it should be the right gift," Mike snaps and when Billy steps closer Mike's holding both hands up, looking a lot like surrender even if his mouth is pulled down at the corners. "It's his first official gift. We got Steve something way better."

"Shut up," Max hisses then, and her bright eyes meet Billy's across the room. shoving Mike's shoulder. As though they all have one brain, six pairs of teenage eyes turn in unison to look at Billy.

“Right,” Billy says slowly. “I can just--”

“We have something for you,” Dustin shouts it, bursts up from where he’s hunched over at Lucas’s shoulder clutching a lumpy, paper-wrapped square. The paper is just plain and brown, but when it’s thrust into Billy’s hands--the rest of the kids behind Dustin poking their heads over his shoulder like some sort of cartoon--he can see that there’s drawings on it.

“Will did them,” Mike says helpfully when Billy runs a finger over one.

There’s a series of crayon and pencil images. His Camaro, long gone now, and Billy crouched in a leather jacket, staring--moodily, he would definitely call the expression Will Byers drew on his face moody--out a window. There’s the Byers’s house, and a rough sketch of the necklace Billy never takes off, and one of Max that Billy recognizes as a real moment from a few months ago--her with both hands around his wrist, trying to drag him to the ground. She’d been trying to win a particularly aggressive game of basketball. Billy hadn’t called her foul.

It’s the drawing in the top left corner next to Dustin’s messy handwriting--which reads To Billy from termites--that Billy’s gaze stops on. He sucks in a sharp breath.

The drawing is a scene from their old apartment in Chicago. He knows it by the tiny kitchen window Will’s drawn behind the couch, the one Harrington always left Christmas lights up around. The drawing itself is of Billy and Harrington. They’re sitting on the couch next to each other. Will’s drawn them with their knees bumping, with Harrington’s cheek flopped lazily against Billy’s shoulder, with Billy’s arm stretched out behind him, his fingers just curling over Harrington’s shoulder.

Billy has never felt *vulnerable* in front of *teenagers* before, not really. He wonders, looking down at this package, if he’s going to fucking cry.

“There’s actually something else inside it,” Dustin says. When Billy looks up he’s rolling his eyes, but Will’s cheeks are tinged red and

Billy lets his mouth curl into something that, under a microscope, under extreme duress, he might admit is a smile.

“Open it,” Dustin says.

Billy does. Slowly and with--with reverence, really--he peels back the corners. Underneath the wrapping, which is in itself the best present he's ever gotten--is a warm, dark winter coat. There's no fur lining the hood, like Harrington's has and which Billy makes fun of endlessly. It's just simple. It just looks warm. He sets the paper down carefully on the table and sheds his leather jacket, pulling it on.

“Thank you,” he says.

“Holy shit,” Max breathes. “You know how to say thank you?”

It breaks the moment, and Billy's so grateful to her for it, because he doesn't know what to do with his face. He chucks his old jacket at her face and then Mike is grabbing El and dragging her back toward the tv because a show he likes is on it, he can hear the music, come on hurry and Lucas tries to help Max fix her hair.

It's just Dustin and Will, then, looking at Billy in his new winter coat. Billy pushes hair out of his face, doesn't really know how to say thank you for something like all this.

“Told you it was a good present,” Dustin says, sounding smug and looking at Will.

“I was on your side!” Will exclaims.

“Yeah,” Billy says. “Really good.”

Then the door swings open. Jonathan shouts for the kids to come help carry groceries in, and Billy is left standing alone in the Harrington's house for a silent two minutes. He can just sort of hear them outside, the rustle of plastic bags, the slamming of car doors.

Harrington is the first through the door. Billy can hear him drop plastic bags in the kitchen, listens to the sound of his footsteps as he comes closer. Harrington appears, suddenly, in front of him. His cheeks are pink from the Hawkins cold and his grin is warm and

immediate the second he sees Billy.

Billy feels like he's drowning. He reaches for Harrington like he's a life vest. "Nice coat," Harrington says, sounding a little surprised when Billy tugs him closer and slides his hands into Harrington's back pockets, but leaning into Billy's chest all the same. "They've been nervous about that for three weeks."

Billy looks up at Harrington's big stupid eyes and feels warm in a lot of different ways, all at once.

3. laundry

Summary for the Chapter:

Billy gives Steve the dubious gift of doing the laundry. It ends up being pretty special.

Steve cannot fucking *believe* that this is happening. “I cannot--how do you even--I can’t believe you have such a vehement *opinion* on this,” he hisses, his eyes narrowed as he glares at Billy. His hands aren’t on his hips, but it’s a near fucking thing.

Billy glares right back. “My work tanks--*all of them* are *pink*, Harrington. You think I wouldn’t have an opinion on this?”

It’s the *Harrington* that lets Steve know they’re in a fight. “Your voice is too fucking loud. We’re in *public*,” Steve snaps, glancing around.

They’re in the laundromat that’s three blocks from the apartment that is theirs. Laundry is usually Steve’s thing. It’s always been Steve’s thing. Except now it’s Sunday morning and they’re standing inches apart, heads bent close over the laundry basket between them. They’re in public. Steve at least has the decency to keep his bitching to a reasonable level of volume.

Billy gapes at him. Like actually gapes. “I didn’t even know you knew the word vehement,” he says in response, which is *mean*, but he at least lowers his voice. “If you can’t fucking do it right, then *I’ll* do it.”

“You don’t *know* how to do laundry,” Steve protests.

“Of course I know how to do laundry.”

“When I *found you* you were sleeping on my *front step* or in *jail!*” and that--that was mean. It also was not quiet. Now everyone is looking at them.

A muscle in Billy’s jaw ticks. “Why are you being such an asshole about this?” he asks, his voice low, private.

“Why are *you* being such an asshole about this? I told you. I’ll replace

your fucking *work tanks*. Jesus Christ.”

“You can’t just go around *replacing* shit,” Billy snaps. “Or did you forget that, *princess*?”

And Steve would like to think he’s mature enough to hear what Billy’s really saying, but it’s coming down to money again, and it’s a Sunday morning. Steve worked the last ten days straight and he’d been looking forward to a nice weekend off with his boyfriend. Excuse him if on day six he’d *accidentally* washed something new and red with Billy’s precious *tank-tops*.

So Steve--in a moment he will later not be particularly proud of--kicks the laundry basket over. His briefs and Billy’s oily jeans spill out onto the garish green and orange tiled floor of the laundromat. “Fine!” Steve snaps, much, *much* too loud. “You do the *fucking* laundry!”

And then he storms out of the place, slamming the door behind him.

The effect is somewhat dulled by the fact that the door apparently can’t slam and like, drifts slowly shut behind him, but whatever. He’s sure that Billy gets the point.

They don’t talk about it.

Except next Sunday, Steve goes to grab the laundry basket and take it three blocks away, and it isn’t there. The detergent is gone. The dryer sheets.

That *asshole*, Steve thinks, every stomped inch of his walk down to the laundromat. When he gets there, Billy’s lounging in a chair, legs spread open, taking up too much space. Steve stomps over and kicks him in the shin.

“Ow,” Billy says. “What the *fuck*, Harrington.”

Steve feels like they’re swearing a lot. Maybe too much.

He stares at Billy. “I do the laundry,” he says.

Billy looks down at his newspaper, glances back up at Steve. “You do

it badly,” he says, simple. “I’ll do it.”

And Steve doesn’t know why, but he tastes salt in his mouth and is blinking too fast all of the sudden. He looks away from Billy, but it doesn’t matter, because Billy’s probably looking back down at his newspaper. “*Fine*,” Steve snaps, and then he’s storming out.

He learned his lesson last time. He doesn’t slam the door shut.

He stops around the corner, leaning back against the bricks to smoke. He’s wiping at his eyes and blowing smoke at a crisp, October sky.

He gets precious few moments of peace before Billy says, “Hey.”

He’s right in front of Steve, then. Steve wants to tell him that he’s standing too close, that they’re in public for Christ’s sake, that he doesn’t want to fight about this anymore, but he just looks somewhere to the left of Billy’s ear.

“Someone is going to steal all our shit,” Steve says.

“No one is going to steal all our shit. It’s like, three pairs of jeans, your stupid expensive briefs, and all my pink tanks.”

Steve’s cheeks heat. His eyes sting. “Okay, you’re right. Sorry I’m so fucking *dumb*, then.”

He can see enough of Billy out of the corner of his eyes to see the way he frowns. “You’re not dumb.”

Steve laughs, takes a drag from his cigarette, laughs again. “I can’t even do the fucking *laundry*,” Steve says. “You called me *Harrington*. You called me *princess*.” He scrubs at his useless eyes, doesn’t want tears on his cheeks.

Billy’s hand is on his jaw, then. Billy doesn’t *ever* touch him in daylight in public, not intimately, not like this. “Sweetheart,” Billy says, voice soft. “What’s going on in your head?”

Steve drops the cigarette and grinds it into the cement below his feet. “My like, parents, or whatever. My mom always says that she knew my dad was forever when he took over doing the laundry when they

had their first place. Before we had maids and shit. I just--" Steve shrugs. "You cook better. You clean better. You like. I don't *know*. I thought--if I just could be like, if I could just, like--"

Billy starts to laugh. He's laughing *at him*.

Fuck you is on the tip of Steve's tongue, but they don't say that to each other. Steve ducks around him. "Whatever," Steve says. "Nevermind. It's stupid."

"It's not stupid. Quit calling yourself stupid. Jesus. Come *here*," and then Billy's got him by the wrist. He's hauling Steve back down the Chicago sidewalk fast enough they have to duck around people. Billy shoves him through the door of the laundromat and then he's planting Steve in front of two washers. "Just separate the whites from the colors," Billy says.

Steve does.

When he's got the quarters in and both machines start humming, Billy says, "You've been so tired," says, "You've been working a lot," says, "I just thought you might want to sleep in. On Sundays."

"You were *mad* at me."

Billy shifts, looks uncomfortable. "I wasn't *really*," he mutters. "I was just. Looking for a good reason to take over the laundry." He scrubs a hand through his curls. "You're my forever, asshole," he says. "I don't need you doing the laundry to know that. Jesus. You're *ridiculous*."

There's a long moment of silence. Steve replays *you're my forever, asshole* in his head a few times.

He blinks. "Are you proposing to me in a *laundromat*?"

Billy groans. "How did I let you trick me into this?" he says. "Jesus. *Jesus*. Yes, you asshole. I've been proposing to you since like, the day we *met*."

"We can't even get *married*."

"Is that a *no*?"

Steve rolls his eyes. “Of course it’s not a no. I’ve been saying yes to you since like, the day we met.”

Behind Steve, someone clears their throat. He turns to see an old woman there, clearly waiting to use the row of machines they’re standing in front of. She’s got a big basket of laundry on her hip and she raises an eyebrow at him when he catches her gaze. Steve flushes, steps aside. “Sorry,” he says quickly.

“No, dear,” the woman says. Her voice is kind. She smiles. “It’s just traditional to kiss at the end of that kind of thing.”

“Oh my *god*,” Steve says, but he leans over and pecks Billy’s lips, just. Quickly.

And that’s how they get engaged.

Later, walking home, Steve says, “We’re gonna need a way better story to tell people.”

Billy snorts. “I kind of like the epic laundry freakout of the early nineties.”

“I *hate* you.”

“But you hate me *forever*, so.”

“Yeah,” Steve says. “I do.”

Notes for the Chapter:

I tripped and fell and missed this verse. Here you go!
I'm @lymricks on tumblr too.